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L.A. workers fall behind

By Michael Rappaport, Staff Writer

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Working people and their families in Los Angeles are lagging behind the rest of California, and the Inland Empire is partly to blame.

That's the conclusion of a report released Monday by the California Budget Project, "Left Behind: Workers and Their Families in a Changing Los Angeles."

The report suggests that while for decades, the nation's second-largest city was a beacon of opportunity, in recent years low-wage jobs have replaced many of the jobs that provided a decent standard of living.

In addition, job growth in Los Angeles, wages, poverty rates and benefits all have fallen further and further behind the rest of California.

"For many people in Los Angeles, changes in the economy and the work force mean it's no longer enough just to work hard," Jean Ross, executive director of the California Budget Project, said in a release.

The news probably doesn't come as any great surprise to local residents. Since 1990, the city of Los Angeles actually has experienced negative job creation.

Meanwhile, the Inland Empire is booming.

"L.A. certainly has not done as well as it might

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have," said Jack Kyser, chief economist with the L.A. County Economic Development Corp. "There has been a great deal of growth, particularly in manufacturing, in the Inland Empire, largely because of the wide array of industrial space available."

Part of the problem is that while Los Angeles was the center of the bust of the early 90s -- when the end of the Cold War had a severe impact on aerospace and related industries -- it was only on the periphery of the following boom.



Manufacturing in the city has declined and many of the jobs that have replaced it have been in service-related industries. Many of these jobs have far lower pay scales than the ones that vanished.

"One of the problems we have here is that there is no unified economic development strategy for Los Angeles County," Kyser said. "There are a lot of cities in the county that care nothing at all about business."

As an example, Kyser cited the upcoming awards his company will present to the cities regarded as the most friendly toward business and job creation.

Of the 88 cities in the county, only 20 even applied for the awards.

The CBP also expressed concern with the ever-growing income and benefits gap between the state and its largest city. In 2004, the median family income in L.A. was \$50,598, 13.3 percent lower than the state as a whole.

In addition, 38.9 percent of residents had incomes lower than twice the federal poverty level, compared to 29.9 percent in the rest of the state.

"Given the enormous size of Los Angeles and the large number of workers there, the

challenges faced by Los Angeles affect the entire state," said Alissa Anderson Garcia, author of the report for the CBP.

Kyser agreed, but said it was strange to hear the news from this particular messenger.

"It's ironic that the California Budget Project is fussing about wage growth and job quality," he said. "They were opposed to the Manufacturers Investment Credit, to enterprise zones and to incentives for low-budget film production. You really can't be for jobs and against the people who create them."

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